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(71) Applicant and

(72) Inventor: **DiPIETRO, Donald [US/US]; 753 North Hill Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91104 (US).**

(74) Agents: **WELLS, William, K. et al.; Kenyon & Kenyon, 1500 K Street, N.W., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005 (US).**

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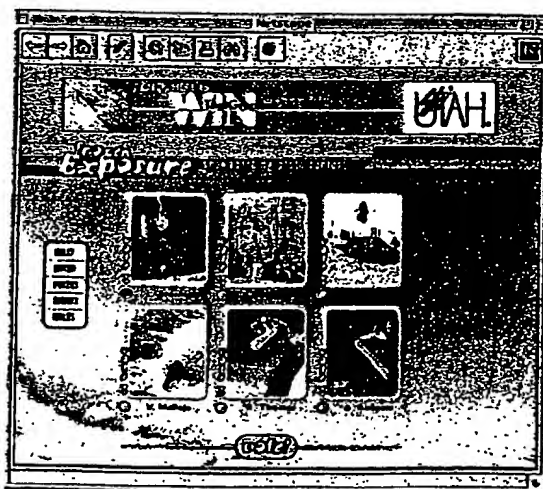
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(54) Title: **SYSTEMS FOR INTERACTIVE VOTING**



(57) Abstract: A system and method are disclosed for integrating on an online service community with a foreign service such as Internet World Wide Web. Online service subscribers gain access through voting and participation in certain contests. The majority of users participate as voters with each voter being certified such that they can only vote once. The system includes algorithms to ensure that every contestant is seen by the same number of voters. The contestants participate by submitting images and other images. Security mechanisms are built into protect the confidential information of the contestants as well. The tally or collation of voting can be referred to on a regular basis to obtain live, updated scoreboard. In this way visitors see how well contestants are faring during the contest.

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SYSTEMS FOR INTERACTIVE VOTING

Background of the Invention

5 Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to systems for human computer interaction. In particular, the present invention relates to a system and method for enhancing a computer user's Internet experience in participating in interactive entertainment. Participants can be involved in the system in at least two ways, one
10 interacting and voting for contestants, and two, by providing certain material as the contestants or at some other level of participation.

Description of Related Art

Computer information services today offer a variety of services and content
15 to their subscribers. Typically the subscribers simply locate, view or download information as it is provided over the Internet from various service providers. In addition, subscribers may communicate with other subscribers which may occur in real time or otherwise. Subscriber interaction may involve joining on going conference room or "chat" sessions managed by the information service.

20 This type of interaction typically involves a place for posting and responding to messages relating to a specific topic. When a message is posted and someone responds, a thread is created which is a string of two or more messages that are related to one another and share a particular subject, topic or heading. A forum

library serves a storage area for documents, graphics and other information that may be browsed, searched, or downloaded. Forum conferences, on the other hand, are live electronic conversations between two or more members. To interact with a subscriber's computer a particular service provider may be equipped with a communication or connection software that has graphical user interface. The communications software allows a subscriber to establish and maintain a connection with the information service and to provide the task and retrieve information content from the service as well as interact with other subscribers. Typically the communication software is designed to support all features and functions of the information service and tailored to a user's interaction with the online service. Content at the online service is typically organized or categorized according to areas amongst groups of users. Content is generally presented or displayed in a similar manner, regardless of the area of interest. Users are able to locate content easily and communicate easily with others who share a similar interest.

The Internet and Worldwide Web ("Web") is comprised of a vast array of international computer networks that provide online service subscribers with additional content resources to search. These computer networks include foreign host computers or servers that users access to locate resources. Typically these resources are accessed using a Web browser, such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator, capable of understanding the hypertext mark up language ("HTML") used to create documents found on the Web. Although Web browsers typically have varying levels of functionality or sophistication, retrieved content is displayed according to views of presentations specific to the Web page currently presented by the Web browser.

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Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates to an Internet oriented interactive system where the participants, as well as voters, are certified to provide security and to ensure accuracy in the interactive voting or other participation. In particular, as described in the preferred embodiment hereafter, each visitor to a particular Internet event can

participate as a contestant or as a voter. Three activities available to each visitor include "sign up", "vote" and "tally". The voter is presented with a number of images, one of which is selected as the best of the group. For contestants, they participate by submitting images in the desired media. Finally, all voters, and
5 especially contestants, return to the site to check the tally which is a live, updated scoreboard that allows visitors to see how well the contestants are faring. A special algorithm is used to ensure that every contestant is seen by the same number of voters. All "sign ups" pass through a secure channel and a ballot certification procedure, and all regulate live voting in real time.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 shows a screen identifying the interactive voting entertainment system.

FIG. 2 shows a home page.

15

FIG. 3 shows a vote screen.

FIG. 4 shows a profile page.

FIG. 5 shows a tally screen.

FIG. 6 is a schematic of the operation of the sign up system utilized in the interactive voting entertainment program.

20

FIG. 7 is a schematic of the voting system that is employed.

FIG. 8 is a schematic of the tally system involved with the interactive voting apparatus.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

25 The interactive voting entertainment system described herein differs from other voting applications because the content originates from the participants and not the site producers. In this way it permits the delivery of an interactive experience, even using slower modems. It gives the contestants an opportunity to advertise their own services for sale or lease, while at the same time permitting other subscribers to
30 interactive and vote on those that appear most desirable. For example, as shown in

FIG. 1, various skiers are shown in a snowboarding photo contest. Once the images are posted, each contestant is encouraged to e-mail other friends and visit the site to vote for their favorites. At the core of this application is an integrated program service system called a "voting engine". This engine is capable of processing
5 millions of simultaneous data, security, and fairness calculations specific to several live, full scale system events running concurrently. The voting engine must also deliver a brisk user experience to a vast audience using dial up bandwidth.

A specific example of the type of sign up, vote and tally shown in connection with a baby contest is shown in FIGS. 2-5. Specifically, as can be seen in FIG. 2,
10 every event has a home page with three choices, in this case the choices are different babies. Other links (sponsor's rules, help, etc.) can originate here as well. There also can be a link to a central location listing all events running at any given time. Graphics, text and other site characteristics are determined by the site producers in accordance with the needs of hosting the Web site and its sponsors. To corral traffic
15 within a host domain the events are designed to be as open or closed as the client desires.

As can be seen in FIG. 3, each photo can be arranged for enlargement to full size and to reach profile information. Each screen is provided with voting opportunities to select the favorite image on each screen. Finally, the votes can be
20 cast by activating the vote tool on the screen. In this case, a navigational bar is provided which permits access to additional information such as tally, prizes, help, etc.

A majority of participants will participate as voters. As seen in FIG. 3, each photograph is arrayed in a clear and equitable layout called the vote screen. After a
25 participant has voted for one group he automatically sees the next six contestants, and so on and so on. On every seventh screen the voter reviews the top picks from the previous six. The voter then selects the best of the best and that contestant receives extra points. The bonus round promotes worthy contestants across the voting population and adds a level of drama and competition to the event to keep
30 voters interested in the site.

To sign up, as can be seen in connection with FIG. 4, certain information is provided for each contestant. The contestant submits images, video files or other media as requested by the event sponsors. The sign up criteria of a contest determines the interest of the contestants. Each contestant must complete a profile that includes personal information comments. As shown in this case, this includes name, birth date, parents and general residence. Once this information is approved the contestant is so notified and their image is portrayed with the information as shown.

With regard to FIG. 5 there is shown how a tally is kept for all the voters in a particular contest. The tally is a live, updated scoreboard that allows visitors to see how the contestants are faring in a particular contest. As can be seen in FIG. 5, the tally includes identification of country, state and the other profile information as shown in FIG. 4. The top performers are shown: in this case item no. 1 has over 21,048 votes, whereas the contestant no. 2 has 2,531 votes. Provision is made through links to enhance the images, sort the criteria through the profile and search other contests if that is so desired. Other contestants can be viewed by utilizing the scroll bar which makes information on other contestants available.

The system has built into it the necessary algorithms to ensure fairness and security for both the contestants and the voters. To guarantee a fair and level playing field for all the contestants, the voting engine uses algorithms to ensure that every contestant is seen by the same number of voters. The difference between the highest scoring and the lowest scoring contestants will be an integer of only one vote per view. For example, the top scoring contestant might have 863 votes and have been seen by 1,000 voters. The lowest scoring contestant in the same event may have only 3 points and it may have been seen by 1,001 voters, or at least no fewer than 999, depending upon when during the rotation cycle the calculation is performed. With this system the results are both accurate and secure.

The steps for the sign up procedure are set forth in FIG. 6 where the contestant, after it decides to sign up, initially receives displayed on the screen a set of instructions directing the contestants to the steps required for submitting the

information and becoming a contestant for a particular program. After the initial set of instructions are completed the contestant is directed to a waiver/release and a set of rules which either the contestant signs, which permits the contestant to move on to other elements of the sign up procedure, or the sign procedure is terminated. If the waiver/release is adopted by the contestant, a profile screen is provided where requested information is input by the user such as last name, e-mail address, etc. After the profile is completed the contestant is directed to submit photo instructions, either over the Internet or with a mail form in the sending the photo to the site producers for a particular contest. If there is an online image file, the contestant is directed through a series of instructions to e-mail the information to the producer with an image data file link that combines the image to the profile data and the administrator for the site producer approves or rejects a particular contestant depending on the approval and an automatic response is made to the contestant. On the other hand, if there is no image data filed, the contestant is directed to a set of instructions to fill out a submission form and to mail the submission form with a photo which ultimately is received by the site producer. Through a scanner the photo, along with an ID or other link to the profile, is allocated to a particular profile for the contestant and again it is either accepted or rejected.

In the voting system, as can be seen in FIG. 7, each voter is subjected to a certification process that ensures the voter only votes in one cycle. Once the voter has identified himSELF or herself, and for a first time sign up there is a set of sign up instructions provided in one sequence of events. The registrant fills out a form with the requisite instructions and once approved there is a ballot created that is certified. This enables the system to have a certification archive for a particular contest. The voter is provided with a password and consequently for each subsequent voting cycle, the voter can be readily identified. Once this information can be obtained, it can be stored in a cupcake which can bypass the certification information in a first sign up to permit the contestant as shown. Once certification is completed, vote screens are provided and in connection with FIGS. 2-5, the first six choices are made available after which a vote is made and the user told to proceed to

the next contest and so on and so on, until all the contests are completed. Each vote is tabulated as shown. Once the voting is completed, the cupcake through the certification archive, or if there has been a stoppage in the voting, that can be recorded by the system as well and the cupcake update will be instructed to permit
5 subsequent votes where appropriate. Again, after the voting is completed, the information is directed to the tally step which, as shown in FIG. 8, maintains a continuing tally in real time of the votes that have been submitted. As can be seen in FIG. 8, the votes are received from the voting algorithms and are recorded in various ways in real time. In this case there is shown national winners, state winners, market
10 and ADI winners, and also the ability to locate the number of votes for a specific contestant. The tally display permits the user to select a particular contest and determine what votes have been made for that contest.

The above has been a detailed discussion of the preferred embodiment. The full scope of the invention is defined in the claims hereafter. Applicant intends to
15 cover any equivalents of this embodiment as well.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for providing interactive methods for foreign service content that includes a plurality of work stations each having a display and an input device and a host computer that has information with respect to certain contests and
5 which is connectable through a network through one or more said work stations comprising:
 - a host computer for providing information with respect to a particular contest in which participants can either vote or participate as a contestant;
 - contestant work station for submitting information requested by the
10 host computer to participate in a particular contest;
 - a voter work station for accessing information with respect to voting on contests at said host computer;
 - said host computer having certification steps for each user at the voter work stations to ensure that the user votes properly during a particular contest.
15
2. The system according to claim 1, wherein said host computer further comprises approval/rejection algorithms for either approving or rejecting a particular contestant.
- 20 3. The system according to claim 2 wherein said host computer has a data base for archiving voters that have been certified to vote in a particular contest.
4. The system according to claim 3, wherein said host computer further comprises a system for searching said certification archive to determine whether a
25 voter has been certified for a particular contest.
5. The system according to claim 4, wherein said host computer includes a system for tallying the votes on a continuous basis and said tally being accessed by said voter work station.

30

6. A method for storing and updating electronic information on a server and accessing said information between a work station and said server, comprising:

- a host computer for providing certain information in respect to contests, where the contents of the contests are provided by contestants through
5 contestant work stations,
voter work stations arranged and connectable to said server for receiving information with respect to a particular contest and transmitting information to the server for voting on a particular contest;
certifying the voter information from a particular voter work station
10 to ensure that the voter is properly voting for each contest.

7. The method according to claim 6, wherein said server includes sign up instructions for contestants before contestants can submit information to participate in a particular contest.

15

8. The method according to claim 2, wherein said sign up procedures include the forwarding of images from said contestant work station.

9. The method according to claim 8, wherein each of said votes from a
20 voter work station is tallied to create a continuous tally of the votes as they are recorded.

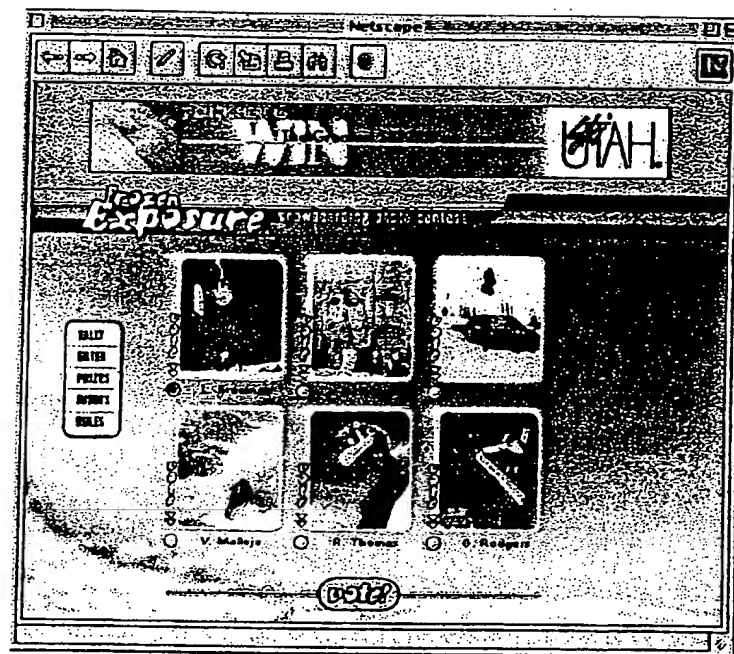
10. The method according to claim 9, wherein said sign up step includes submitting images from said contestant work station to said server.

25

11. The method according to claim 10, wherein the server receives from each contestant work station identification and profile for each contestant and said server correlates the contestant profile with the images from a particular work station.

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FIG. 1^{1/8}



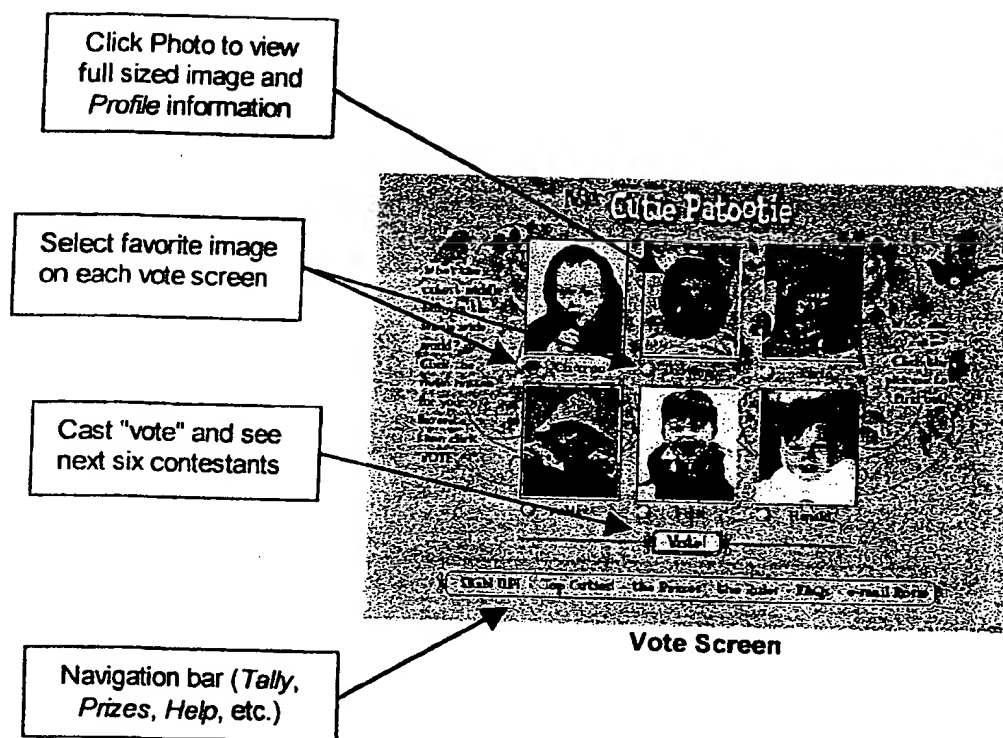
2/8
FIG. 2



Home Page

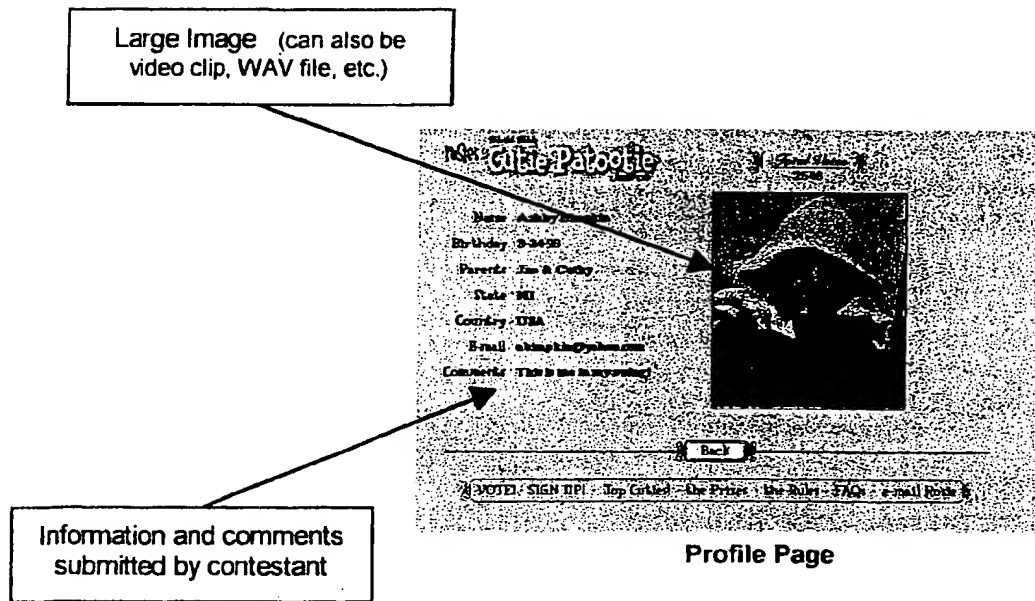
3/8

FIG. 3



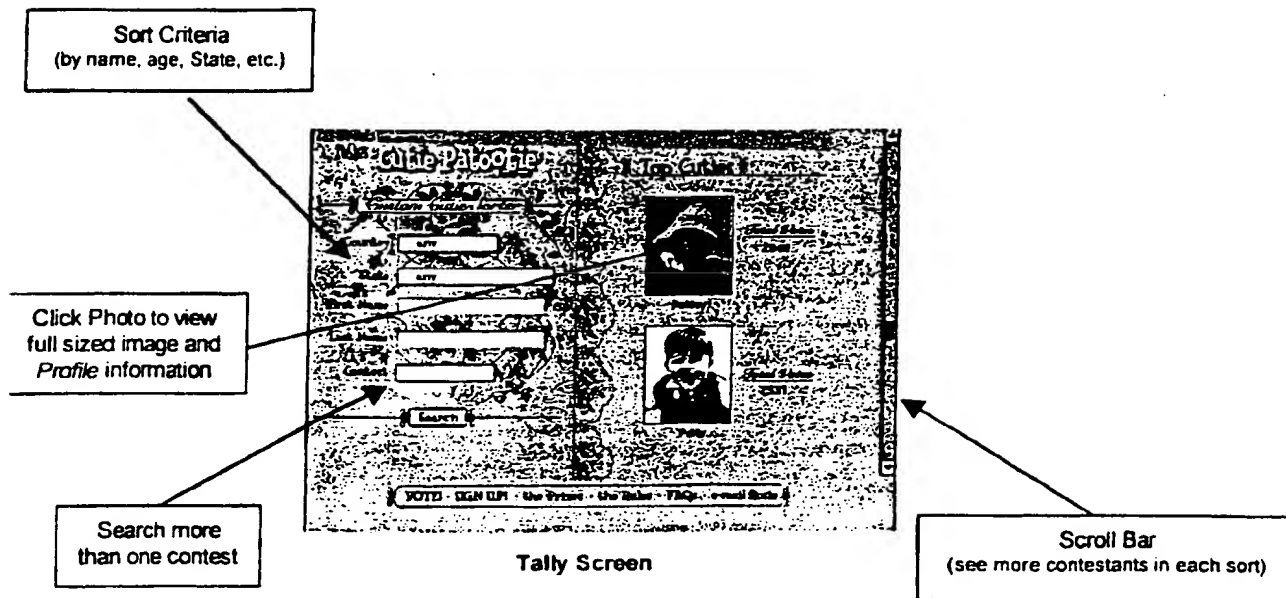
4/8

FIG. 4



5/8

FIG. 5



6/8
FIG. 6

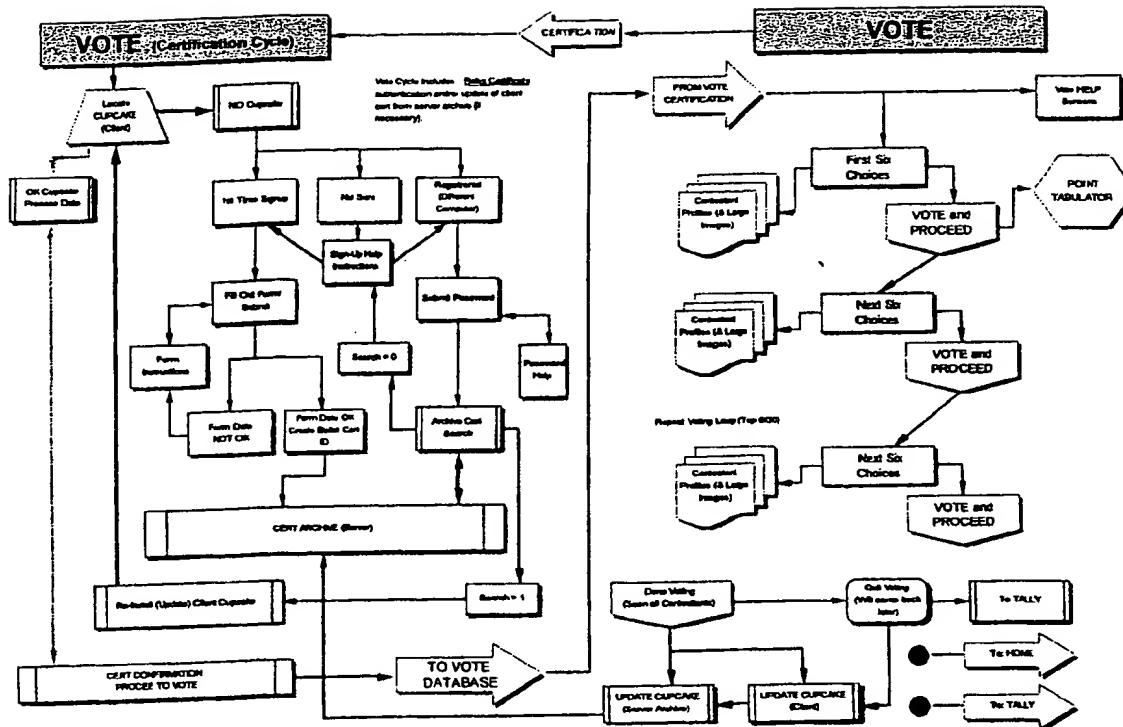
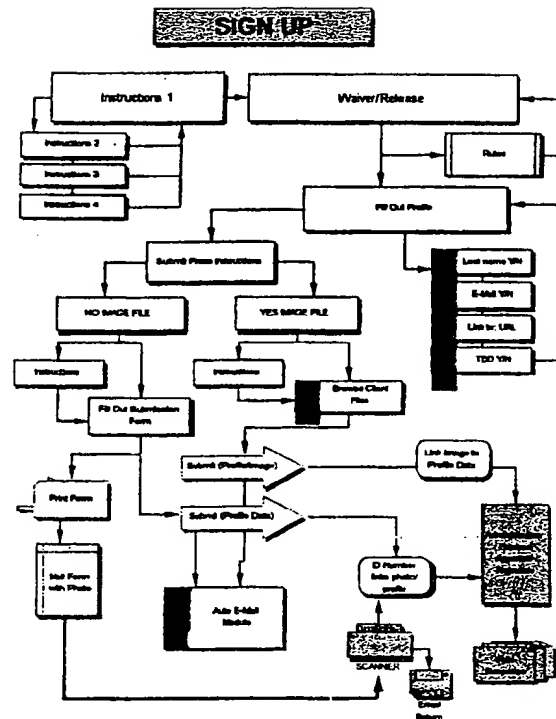
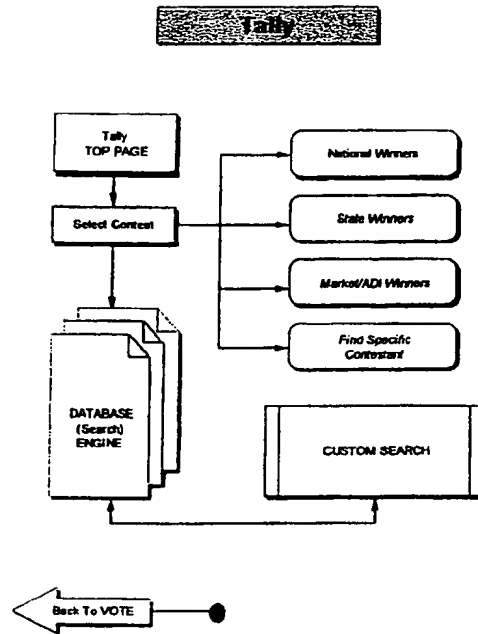


FIG. 7^{7/8}



8/8
FIG. 8



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/15809

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : G06F 17/60

US CL : 705/12

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/12

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

Please See Extra Sheet.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,846,132 A (JUNKIN) 08 December 1998, col. 9, lines 17-31;	1, 6
---	col. 13, lines 33-56	-----
Y	col. 3, lines 39-55; col. 4, lines 7-22; col. 12, lines 47-60;	2-5, 7-11
Y	US 5,263,723 A (PEARSON et al.) 23 November 1993, col. 14, lines 12-39; col. 16, lines 1-26	2-5, 7-11
Y,E	US 6,092,051 A (KILIAN et al.) 18 July 2000, col. 2, lines 18-48; col. 3, lines 11-67; col. 4, lines 1-16	5

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
E earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
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O document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

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Name and mailing address of the ISA/US
Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks
Box PCT
Washington, D.C. 20231

Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230

Authorized officer

TOD SWANN

Telephone No. (703) 305-3900

Rugenio Zaga

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US00/15809

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Electronic data bases consulted (Name of data base and where practicable terms used):

STN. DIALOG

search terms: plurality, computer, network, voter, contest, workstation, Internet, scoreboard, tally, count, vote, collate,
real-time, server, interactive